

**Colorado NRCS Leadership Team Meeting Minutes
February 12 – 14, 2006**

Attendees:

John Andrews	Mike Gillespie	Steve Park
Eugene Backhaus	Allen Green	Randy Randall
Ila Binard	Roy Hall	Frank Riggle
John Brenner	Callie Hendrickson	Petra Walker
Shane Briggs	John Knapp	Mike Wall
Tim Carney	Cindy Lair	Cathee Wilson
David Doty	Greg Langer	
Jan Fritch	George Melton	

Notetaker: Debbie Kanatzar

(Note: Each presenter provided handouts and/or presentations.)

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Randy R. – Welcome/Agenda Review:

- Welcome – DC's Jan Fritch, Brighton and Greg Langer, Colorado Springs

Gene B. – ECS Activities:

- Training Status
 - RUSLE2 and XWEQ/Soil Conditioning Index for Area 4 – mid April
 - CNMP Specialist Certification Workshop – May through July
 - Nutrient Management Part 2 and 3 – dates TBD
 - Wind Erosion Prediction Software (WEPS) not out yet but to be released by the end of the year.
 - Cultural Resources Training Workshops – May through June – All Areas.
 - NEPA for Area 1 – April
 - Corps IV possible, depends on need
 - Grazing land Suitability Analysis Tool (GSAT) range cons trained in January.
 - CNMP Planning Tool – as requested by Areas
 - Conservation Planning Training – participant lists requested, only seven people currently enrolled.
 - IWM Training – adding a part on integrating into conservation planning – July 9 – 14 in Fort Collins.
- Conservation Reserve Program
 - No new general sign-up scheduled for 2007 or 2008
 - Continuous sign-ups will continue
 - We have \$900,000 in CRP assistance dollars to use
 - NRCS is currently testing a new certification process for CCA as TSPs that should use less NRCS time up front but could create more NRCS training of CCAs that need planning training.
 - Working with National office on redesign of the TSP website and functionality.

- Air Quality Plan for Rocky Mountain National Park
 - ECS and Water Resources took part in the development of the Agricultural Section.
 - Colorado NRCS CIG grant being used to test Best Management Practices (BMPs) – Karma Anderson is the NRCS contact.

Petra W. – Public Affairs Update:

- March 15 is the SO Congressional Update
- PAS training for Area 2 & 3 to be scheduled
- Earth Day - Conducting a coloring contest
- Ag Day – March 31
- Printing by Government printing office (GPO)
 - If you use GPO, please provide Petra with a copy of the SF-1 and all other print forms.
 - NHQ requires PAS to track all print jobs.
 - Forms are electronic – PAS can provide the form.
 - Copy jobs for GPO need at least a ten day lead time.
- FEW recognition next month

Ila B. – Comment - All copying over 500 sheets must be sent to the Government Printing Office.

Frank R. – Water Management/Water Quality:

- IWM Tool training for Area 2 & 3
 - Jason Peel can give a ½ day training session
- Karma is working on a field orientated training on CAFO
 - Area 2 or 3 – available to conduct 1 to ½ day session this summer.
- NRI Burden on the field due to our budget
 - No funds to contract out – NRCS staff will need to complete the sample segments
 - Suggest pairing experienced staff to train inexperienced staff
 - Estimate 110 rangeland segments.
 - The cropland sampling anticipate workload the same as this year.
 - Once the sites are determined, a teleconference will be scheduled.

Steve P. – Soils:

- Soil Datasets
 - All SURGO surveys have been uploaded with new data.
 - The Dept of Homeland security and the Dept of Defense interpretations are available for all certified surveys.
 - Refresh rates – plan to do once a year unless an error is found.

- Second version of Web Soil Survey was demonstrated at the meeting last week.
 - More user friendly
 - Coming out later this spring

Mike W. – Technology Team Update:

- Summary of Technology Team Recommendations:
 - Improve Training
 - Better use of current technology
 - Improve technology applications
- Tim Weltmer was selected to fill the vacant position on the Technology Team.

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Ila B. – Admin Updates:

- SCEPs
 - 11 returning and 3 new students
 - Locations have been identified
 - DC training for SCEP supervisors on April 17.
 - Updating the SCEP/DC handbook
 - June 4 is orientation for the SCEPs and DCs
 - We are at our limit – budget wise – for SCEPS.
- Civil Rights
 - April 30 – May 4 is the National Civil Rights Review
 - Ila encouraged all ACs to have their Field offices print out the Civil Rights Posters and display.
 - Wray and Franktown will be reviewed this year as part of the State level CR review.
- Computer deployment - SCEPs will be assigned a computer that will also be used for training purposes when SCEPS are not working.
- Copier Update
 - Meeting with different copier manufactures to determine if one vendor can accommodate all our needs.
 - Considering new copiers that have the capability to scan, copy, print and fax.
 - Plotters will be looked at later.
- Training
 - Mandatory Administrative Training on March 5 – 7 at the State office for Area Administrative Staff and State office secretaries.
 - New DC training scheduled for March 26 – 30 currently, 12 scheduled and room for up to 20 attendees.
 - Ila requested to provide HR training at DC meetings and attended the Area All Employee meetings.
 - Five retirement trainings will be held in September and October.

- Beginning in March, Ila has asked her staff to work with the field staff in the field for 3 – 5 days.
- Awards - Ila asked the ACs to prepare their own certificates by AACs

Lynn H. – Budget (handouts):

- Lynn reviewed the Fiscal year 2007 Support Costs through January 31, 2007 (33%). No funds for awards; however, we do have funds for spot awards.
- Budgeted vacancies reviewed.
- 2007 Budgeted Reimbursables reviewed
- Review of Comparison of Obligations to Budget - we have a balanced budget with severe restriction for equipment, vehicles, and staffing.
- Cut back on travel to help fund items of importance, e.g. DC training.
- Keep Lynn Hahn informed.
- Allen will continue to approve out-of-State travel.
- FNM is auditing 100% of our open obligations.
- Lynn Hahn is reviewing all contracts before they are sent to NHQ to prevent contracts being returned for simple problems e.g. scan not readable.

Randy R. – Operations:

- Direct Charge (handout provided and reviewed).
 - We are running a predicted deficit at 17,000 hours.
 - Programs to watch closely.
 - EQIP – 27,000 deficit
 - CTA Direct – 12,414 deficit
 - RC&D – 1,312 deficit
 - Snow – 6,796 deficit
 - PRS/Goals (handout provided and reviewed).
 - Current goal status reviewed – PowerPoint graphs (handout).
- State Efficiency Plan discussed:
 - State Efficiency includes office locations.
 - Ultimately, the plan will include changes.
 - It will show what our future staffing should be.
 - We must reduce 1% of overhead costs
- National Conservation Innovation Grants discussed:
 - Eight applications were sent to NHQ
 - Reviewed the Proposed State CIG timeline.
- Quality Assurance
 - Consolidated Plan reviewed
 - Area 3 State Level Sensing July 16 – 19, 2007
- State Level Quality Assurance Plan reviewed

Tim C. – Programs:

- Eligibility Updates
 - FSA is updating the producer eligibility of every member in their database, prioritizing 2007 NRCS EQIP applicants.
 - It takes a couple of weeks for some of the updates to go through both the NRCS & FSA linked computer systems.
 - Mid March deadline for initial EQIP contract obligations in ProTracts. Eligibility updates may affect some program applicants.
 - Once the data is updated, late this spring we will need to run a check to determine eligibility of producers with program cost share payments made.
- EQIP
 - All applications must be screened and ranked Friday, Feb. 16.
 - Invasive Species Initiative
 - Committee evaluated the 25 proposals and determined that 22 proposals at an estimated \$1.0 million selected. Signups in March. Contracts written in ProTracts.
 - GSWC – Working to review and possibly update the program.
 - Salinity/BSPP
 - EQIP Salinity \$/ton salt saved cost share caps raised for 2007.
 - Requesting BSPP TA funds.
 - National initiative for CNMP
 - CNMP needs concentrated in Area 2.
 - 20 to be completed this year
 - New initiative directs F/A funding for CNMP implementation through outside certified professionals.
 - AM type cost shared CNMP practices that may be broken down into 12 components such as large, med, small CAFOs or AFOs, etc.
 - Optional this year; however, it will be a part of EQIP in 2008+.
 - CNMP initiative contracts & mods must be completed by the end of August.
 - Tim will develop a bulletin.
- WHIP sign up for funded project areas in April.
 - Plan to continue with the RFP process.
- CSP
 - Secretary indicated there would not be a sign-up this year. National agency staff feels that may possibly change.
 - In the next Farm Bill, strong possibility that CSP will be simplified.
- WRP - National review of all old WRP financial obligations ongoing

- GRP - Final year that funds are to be spent and the funds may be used on pending agreement applications and monitoring.
- Easements – general - Proposed a 1 – 2 hour Easement 101 training for Areas/Field
- FRPP - Required too close easement deals in 18 months.
- Ranking Tool and Cost List
 - Evaluating the 2007 program ranking tool & cost list - Asking for input to ACs and AR-Ps
 - Considering moving to earlier cut-of dates for programs to allow for more up front conservation planning time. Proposed dates:
 - WRP – July 15
 - EQIP – November 1

Mike G. – Snow Report:

- Snow survey training school in Tahoe.
 - The Chief attended the school and fit in well with the group.
 - Plan to hold West-Wide Snow Survey Training school at Snow Mountain Ranch next year.
- Colorado Snowpack Summary for 2007 - Statewide from 94% to 91% of average as of February 1
- As of today, Colorado SNOTEL Snowpack - 86% statewide average.
- New Experimental Daily Streamflow Forecast
 - Three graphical forecast products per forecast point
 - Completely automated uses hydroclimaic data collected by the SNOTEL and USGS data networks
 - Unofficial forecasts on an experimental basis
 - Most useful as a guide to basin trends between monthly forecasts or assessing the impacts of storm events subsequent to forecasts.

Area Updates:

- David D. – Area 1
 - Continuation CSB Funds
 - Working with Carl Zimmerman
 - Maintaining BOR funds – 10 positions
 - Private Lands Biologist on Board
 - Training for partners there is a learning and acceptance curve
 - We need to increase the opportunities to train our partners
- John K. – Area 3
 - Greg Langer new DC in Colorado Springs
 - Looking to provide CCA reimbursement/training continue certification
 - Same for pesticide certification
 - Severe Snow update

- Roy H. – Area 2
 - Todd Boldt is receiving a Service to Agriculture Award from the Fort Collins Rotary Club on February 14.
 - Healthy Conservation District booth at Farm Show
 - Yuma County Conservation District receiving an Excellence Award
 - WRP – 7 application
 - CREP – Interest High
 - EQIP – Mixed numbers
- Cathee W. – Area 4
 - Potato Grain Conference - Richard Sparks guest speaker
 - Bio-diesel discussion
 - LaJunta
 - San Luis
 - Dove Creek
 - Rio Grande is looking at CIG
 - Conejos Board members doing flow meter readings to earn money.
 - New AAC – Charlene Lucero
 - Cathee requested going back to quarterly HR updates, i.e. retirements, promotions, etc.
 - Chanda Garcia received partnership excellence award
 - Training Dates
 - March 13 - 14 – CNMP Alamosa
 - May 1 – 3 Cultural Resources – Bill Volf
 - March 7 – NRI
 - Civil Rights recommendations reviewed and approved by LT.

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Partner Update:

- Cindy L. – CSCB
 - Department of Agriculture new staff
 - Ag Commissioner – John Stulp
 - New State Weed Coordinator – Kelly Ewing
 - Cooperative Conservation Initiative Grant
 - Assisted NRCS with the EQIP Invasive Species proposal process
 - Cindy would like to strengthen the partnership with NRCS DCs
 - CSCB Survey - closing on February 28
 - DC Technician Program
 - The State was able to provide the 25% CASH match – local match is needed at 25%.
 - 50% Federal government match

- Changed name from Farm Bill technician to Conservation District Technician
- February 14 was the beginning of Direct Assistance application process - Completed applications are due by May 1.
- Basin State Salinity Control Parallel Program - Local changes and strong potential for changes at the Forum level.
- Spring Training Schedule
 - Six locations are offered statewide and teleconference and internet capabilities for those who are unable to attend.
 - Alternate snow days are included in parentheses
 - ❖ March 7 – Limon (April 19)
 - ❖ March 8 – Greeley (April 18)
 - ❖ March 12 – Pueblo (April 16)
 - ❖ March 19 – Alamosa (April 27)
 - ❖ March 22 – Durango (April 26)
 - ❖ March 23 – Grand Junction (April 25)
 - Grant writing training to be scheduled
- March 18 - Benefit concert at the State Fair to benefit the ranchers and farms that have considerable losses from the winter storms this year.
- The Board is anticipating encouraging the Districts in Tier 1 to join in the efforts of other Districts – consolidating to strengthen the Districts.
- Callie H. – CACD
 - Board asked Callie to focus on two major tasks
 - Legislative
 - ❖ Continue Matching Grants and Conservation Technician funding same as last year.
 - ❖ New bill for Forest Improvement Districts – Conservation Districts are to be listed as a board member as the new Forest Improvement Districts are formed.
 - ❖ A concern was developed whether the CD are exempt.
 - CACD will be carrying a bill to clarify that Districts have always been tax exempt and will continue to be.
 - ❖ Randy Loutzenhiser contacted legislatures asking for their support of the Senate's version for CTA funding.
 - CACD sent letters to all Federal Legislators asking for their support on this issue.
 - Attended NACD Meeting
 - Colorado Districts were recognized.
 - Bob Cordova is now NACD Second Vice President.
 - Camp Rocky – planning is going well

- Teacher's workshop discussed
 - Education committee chair is vacant
 - Not planning a teacher's workshop this year, plan to hold in 2008
- Watershed meetings – watershed awareness concept
 - Delta CD is hosting two meetings this winter
 - Fort Morgan CD in hosting one meeting in March
 - NRCS Public Affairs is providing guidance to the Districts on the purpose of holding these meetings.

Jan Fritch – Brighton Field Office Feedback:

- Appreciates the interaction that takes place at the meeting.
- Employee Assessment tool - a guideline would be helpful, i.e., a benchmark for a GS-9.
- State office should notify the Field on approved allocation for EQIP showing how much each watershed is going to receive, like they had done in the past.
- EQIP
 - Operator wants to do conservation practices; however, the landowner does not want to tie up the land.
 - Policy, rules out to the Field as early as possible.
- Goals - Field needs guidance on how to clean up NCP and Toolkit database.

Greg L. – Colorado Springs Field Office Feedback:

- It is good to hear the input from SO staff.
- Good technology information.
- Easement training – good idea.
- Standard drawings are helpful to DCs
- EQIP – Small acreages
 - Big part of Field workload
 - Would be a great option if small acreages could be included in EQIP

Open Discussion/Closing Comments:

Allen G. – Advisory Teams

- The vision is to improve communication from State office to Field
- Meet at least once a quarter e.g. face-to-face, teleconference.
- A modem to share ideas, discussion, and possible solutions.

Adjourn at 11:30a.m.